I Tweet, You Tweet, (S)He Tweets:
Enhancing the ESL Language-Learning Experience Through Twitter

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ABSTRACT
This study seeks to further the research on online language learning by examining the level at which intermediate ESL students understand and process sociopragmatic information in their second language (L2) in globally networked environments like Twitter. In this semester-long study, L2 English learners from a variety of first languages (Chinese, Spanish, Arabic) analyzed authentic English-language tweets produced by well-known native speakers, with a focus on abbreviations, hashtags and tweeter mood. Results revealed that high intermediate ESL students relied most heavily on word choice when making sense of English tweets, demonstrating that a majority were able to extract significant meaning from common abbreviations, prosified hashtags, indices of tweeter mood and the tweet’s larger context. This investigation highlights Twitter’s status as an authentic and dynamic L2 setting that facilitates the cultural enrichment of learners and enhances their socio-pragmatic awareness, while developing their multiliteracy skills in an L2.

KEYWORDS
Implicit Learning, L2 Acquisition, Language Learning, Microblogging, Multiliteracy Skills, Noticing, Socio-Pragmatic Development, Twitter

INTRODUCTION
The popular microblogging tool, Twitter, which debuted in 2007 and currently reports over 500 million users (Semiocast, 2012; Oreskovich, 2015), is one of the ten most visited websites worldwide (Fitzgerald, 2012). Twitter is viewed as a prominent method for information gathering and propagation, and is commonly used by teenagers, adults and celebrities (athletes, politicians, singers, etc.) (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). The growing popularity of this social media has transformed literacy perspectives by highlighting everyday vernacular practices (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Jones (2016) recently underscored the fact that digital technology has altered the way people use language. Preston (2012) further argued that digital literacy is becoming a required skill for active members of the workforce. The ability to search for and critically evaluate information online, to construct meaningful reading paths through hypertext documents, to comment on the online writing of others in appropriate ways and to construct knowledge collaboratively through a variety of online platforms have become essential aspects of our daily interactions. Despite this recent communicative
evolution, current research continues to document how foreign language textbooks lack authenticity by failing to introduce current linguistic norms, instead focusing on grammatical rules and cultural simplifications. Studies have shown that speakers’ identity of the target language is often framed in terms of static national culture and standard language (Cole & Meadows 2013; Dervin & Liddicoat 2013). Such a nationalist frame promotes, as Cole & Meadows call it, an ‘essentialist trap’ (p.30), where perspectives of language and culture result in the spreading of stereotypes. Consequently, language learners frequently display the understanding of language and culture in terms of static codes through frequent linguistic and cultural generalizations, even though L2 teaching and learning should challenge this monolithic representation (Blyth, 2015), by allowing students to experience “the language of the speech community in terms of content, frequencies of that content and the mappings of form to functional interpretation” (Ellis, 2002a, p. 167). Vellenga (2004) explained that the omission of authentic linguistic samples in language textbooks results in the lack of a reliable source of (sociopragmatic) input, which restricts learners in their ability to notice valuable input and learn implicitly (Ellis, 2002a; 2002b). This conscious oversight prevents language learners from acquiring digital literacy, as such a skill cannot be intuited, but rather is developed via the analysis of naturally occurring language samples. Numerous scholars have documented language educators’ view of textbooks as inadequate in terms of providing ‘nontraditional’ and authentically grounded pedagogical tasks (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Hassal, 2008; Uso-Juan, 2007; Vellenga, 2004; among others). It is possible for dedicated language instructors to overcome these shortcomings by providing learners with pragmatically appropriate input, but it requires the creation of additional activities that reflect language in its current uses and forms. Likewise, digital opportunities for learners to use foreign languages in authentic ways extracurricularly are evident and accessible albeit avoided if learners do not feel like competent members of the online communities. The challenge of 21st century language instructors thus reveals itself as one of designing environments and pedagogical methods to guide students through activities that promote a greater awareness of the forms and functions of social media, and encapsulate general practices in digital literacy, which encourage the discovery of new linguistic forms in the target language and eventually trigger a restructuring of the learner’s interlanguage system (Schmidt, 1990). The present study offers one way to use the microblogging tool Twitter to provide students with linguistic input, following a method that allows them to notice and experience the authentic forms commonly used by native speakers, but which are not often formally presented in traditional foreign language textbooks. Our goal is to highlight the importance of non-traditional input through electronic media, by establishing it as a complementary linguistic source that is capable of enriching L2 competence via the overt noticing of different language types (abbreviations, acronyms, slang, etc.) typically used in Twitter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Twitter in ESL and Foreign Language Classes

The last decade has witnessed a plethora of studies investigating the power of social media in foreign language learning, capitalizing on learners’ new technological habits. A wide range of electronic tools and tasks have been the focus of pedagogically oriented studies, mostly in non-immersion contexts (Abraham & Williams, 2009; Antenos-Conforti, 2009; Blattner, Dalola & Lomicka 2015, 2016a; 2016b; Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Blattner & Lomicka 2012; Hanna & de Nooy, 2003; 2009; Lomicka & Lord, 2012; Perrifianou, 2009). Digital literacy practices tend to be marginalized in mainstream ESL classrooms, where instruction remains primarily focused on a curriculum that exclusively promotes the language skills required to operate in print-based environments or unmediated face-to-face settings (Hafner, Chick, & Jones, 2013). Research on the use of social media in ESL classes in higher education is still limited, as are studies focusing on the potential of microblogging tools (i.e. Twitter) to allow learners to notice authentic input (Schmidt, 1993). This trend is perplexing,
“I Think” in NS and Chinese NNS Spoken English
Lan-fen Huang (2014). *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 84-100).
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